

*SBT-AE-002. Sophist. P S Remesh Chandran Poem.*

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## **Sophist. A Poem By P S Remesh Chandran**

*Editor, Sahyadri Books & Bloom Books, Trivandrum*



By [PSRemeshChandra](http://nut.bz/oth.plgi/), 2 Sep 2010. Short URL <http://nut.bz/oth.plgi/>

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The ancient Sophist saints in Greece were exceptionally clever with the use of their tongues. Don't play with them- they can bind us cunningly with their tongues. And don't corner them- we will never forget what hit us. Here in this poem, one sophist saint is tried in Court for crime when Judges get stung. Classical sophists were well-versed in paradoxes, understanding the meaning of which won't be easy. So, here, the court had to let him go free.

**A poem with a Greek theme, praising the sophists' skills in paradoxes.**

Words are what convey human thoughts to others, and unless they are sharpened and used as weapons, mankind won't survive, for man has no other armour than words to defend himself against other human beings. A sharper precise word, sometimes spoken loud, may act like weapon and save one's life. In times of crises, faculties with words come naturally to man: it is so, because anti-survival instincts also are inborn in man; it's a natural safeguard against self-destruction. No other creatures in the world have so much self-destructing traits in them as man. Saints, scholars and sophists are needed by mankind for safe-guarding against its own anti-survival instincts.

## **SOPHIST**

### **A POEM BY P S REMESH CHANDRAN**

A sophist saint in ancient Grecian land  
Said whatever he said was a falsity,

Was asked to state anything before he died,  
When once he'd committed an act of crime.

He would be hanged, if tell the truth he did;  
And would be beheaded, if he told untruth.

Being always prepared for th'unexpected,  
That to be beheaded was he, stated he.

If he was executed cutting throat,  
Then that would prove that what he'd told was truth,

For which the sentence had to be hanging him,  
Thereby to prove that he had told untruth,

For which again to be cut the head apart,  
Or if to be hanged; is this a paradox?

So thinking such and such the Judges swoon'd,  
And asked the saint to step out from the Court.

Thus neither to be beheaded or be hanged,  
He roamed the country side and forest land.

**A magpie on the gallows, always swift to fly away.**



*01. A magpie on the gallows.*

Sophists were learned saints who lived among ancient Greeks and Romans. They were well-versed in paradoxes. A paradox is a statement which appears to be false, but which is true. One sophist once said: 'Whatever I say is false.' What is the true meaning of

this phrase- is he a regular teller of lies or truth? If that statement is true, then he must be a regular teller of untruth. But what if that statement also is false? Then the meaning would be in the negative, meaning he would tell truth too occasionally. That is the skill of a sophist in dealing cleverly with words and escaping unscathed on occasions when faced with danger.

**Sophists were sophistications in verbal combats, personified in human form.**

Sophists can say tricky things, understanding the meaning of which wouldn't be easy. Trying to understand the true meaning of their words would make our heads spin. In this poem the Sophist is said to have told people, whatever he said was a falsity. So we will begin to think that he is a frequent sayer of lies. But what if that very sentence also is a lie? Then it may mean that he may occasionally tell the truth. Trying to understand the true meaning of their sayings will make our heads spin. That is why, in history, we see people keeping themselves at a distance from sophists, for fear of being outsmarted and also out of respect.

Mathematics and Logic were developed remarkably well in ancient Greece. Analysis, logic and deduction were, and are, essentials to understanding the words of a Sophist. Sophists and their tricky sentences have always been a

fascination for the world. They were sophistications of verbal combats personified in human form. In many lands they were known as Sufi Saints. We know Mullah Nazaruddeen was one among them. Such people who can soothe, please, entertain and terrorize the world through their words are what language, literature and society wants to have in plenty, but unfortunately is too short in.

### **He roamed the countryside and forest land.**

#### *02. He roamed the countryside and forest land.*

Sophists are not a lost race. In all centuries and in all countries, they are there. Entertaining their people through wit and wisdom, encouraging them to laugh and learn through life, they



live safe and secure among the intolerant and the jealous people of their times, inspiring societies, villages, towns and nations with their words and lives. A person recently, in the same place where the Portuguese Captain Vasco da Gama landed in India and thereby opened the oceans of the Orient to European trade, thought that enough respect and reverence were not being shown to the hundreds and hundreds of Washing Stones situated at that famous Kozhikkode beach. After centuries of continuous service, he saw, they were being neglected by people, without respecting their good service. So, he organized a large public meeting and a parade, to honour the centuries-long services of these washing stones. Thousands of people took part in that meeting and parade, and paid tribute to the meritorious services of those washing stones. His name was late Mr. Raama Daasan Vaidyan- the same person who delighted and enlightened people through his half-crazy but thoughtful acts, including the starting of a Training College for Coconut Climbing and asked the IAS guest to inaugurate the college by climbing a

coconut tree. In every society, if we look, we can see sophists still in vigorous action, in the east, as well as in the west.

### **The First Sophistic Movement in the 5th century BC.**

The earliest known Sophists of the world were of the 5th century BC who knew the importance of words and gained fame through debates and discourses, becoming experts in the usage of rhetoric. The prosperous city of Athens became their haven. Some of these sophists trained their pupils to argue from both points of view, i.e., for and against, to bring out the truth. The philosophies of most of them were acrimonious attacks on the religion, law and ethics of the times. They dissected religion, law and ethics in the open and forced Athenians to become more and more democratic. Not all agreed with them but the Athenian democracy, through their consistent and persuasive speeches and also by support of their rich and influential pupils, gradually learned to tolerate opposing views and criticism also and allow all views to be voiced in assembly platforms. Their persuasive arguments in support of their causes distinguished them as the first lawyers in the world. In history, we call this phase the First Sophistic Movement- a strictly political movement.

The later Greek School of Thought criticized them for their use of ‘rhetorical sleight-of-hand and ambiguities of language’ to deceive people through words and to support their fallacious reasoning. Aristophanes called them hair-splitting wordsmiths. Aeschines, Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias, Thrasymachus, Lycophron, and Antiphon were the earliest of these sophists but their words did not survive and today we know about them through the words of their fiendish enemies like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle who condemned them for accepting money for teaching and declining to teach none but the aristocratic. The essence of this criticism was that the sophists ‘would argue any position for the right fee’. Anyway, even Socrates considered them better educators.

### **The Second Sophistic Movement in the Graeco-Roman Society in AD.**

Following the teachings of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in centuries before Christ, philosophy in the First Century AD had differentiated itself from sophistry and sophistry established as a separate pedagogical branch firmly rooted on rhetoric. It was Plato who differentiated philosophy from sophistry and accused sophists of deviating from the knowledge-seeking path of the



early sophists and selling fake wisdom for money. Sophistry was forced to say farewell to politics also and turn to explaining and defining poetry, literature and education and common man's common problems. Laws were enacted to restrain (aggressive) sophists from meddling in the political affairs of the state which already had transformed itself from pure Hellenic to Graeco-Roman. Aelius Aristides, Himerius, Libanius, Chrysostomos and Nicetes of Smyrna were pioneers of this Graeco-Roman movement which finally culminated in thoroughly remodeling Roman education on Greek sophistic lines through Cicero.

**Persuasive speeches were the key characteristic of a sophist.**



03. Athens 1832 By Martinus Rørbye.

Sophos is an adjective derived from the noun sophia, which means 'skilled or wise'. A sophoi is 'an expert with excellence in his occupation'. Sophia, sophizo, sophisma and sophistēs are other Greek words connected with wisdom. The key characteristic of sophists was their persuasive speeches which they used to move people in directions they chose. Gatherings of people and eloquent politicians and philosophers delivering persuasive speeches were a common scene in the ancient Grecian and Roman societies. In history we see Julius Caesar's, Mark Antony's and Savo Narola's speeches moving people to dire action. It is this persuasive power of speeches the sophists made use of and developed into an art. Today the

world has lowered their ranks and remembers them only as teachers who trained the rich aristocrats to make persuasive speeches to help them seize authority or remain in authority. In this sense, sophists can be called King-Makers, like Chanakya was who was an Indian version who through his persuasive speeches made his disciple Chandra Gupta an emperor.

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### **Meet the author: About the author and accessing his other literary works.**



Editor of Sahyadri Books & Bloom Books, Trivandrum. Author of several books in English and in Malayalam. And also author of 'Swan, The Intelligent Picture Book'. Edits and owns Bloom Books Channel. Born and brought up in Nanniyode, a little village in the Sahya Mountain Valley in Kerala. Father British Council-trained English Teacher and mother university-educated. Matriculation with High First Class, Pre Degree studies in Science with National Merit Scholarship, discontinued Diploma Studies in Electronics and entered politics. Unmarried and single.

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This is an excellent poem. Grecian conundrum.

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